

Are you obeying Jesus' command to watch and pray?

(So that you do not get tricked and end up falling away.)

"It is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Romans 13:11).

Occasionally I will ask a Christian if he is in the habit of asking God to help him so that he does not end up falling away (so as to perish). Almost every single one of them answers, "No." When I ask, "Why not," some say, "Since all of God's elect will be glorified, why should I pray that God keeps me from **falling away**?"¹ Others say, "I believe that once a person is saved, they are **always saved**."²

Recently, one of these Christians said he has never heard of any Christian praying this way. He insisted that, to help him be persuaded to pray that way, I should show him Bible passages in which such a prayer is recorded. I wrote this article to show him that the Bible does record believers praying along these lines. But even more important, Jesus commands us to pray this way. First, let us consider Jesus' warning and command. After that, a few actual prayers from the Bible will be provided.

Near the very end of His time on earth, Jesus told His disciples about things that would happen later. Then, He passionately warned them that in light of these things, they must watch and pray so that they don't end up perishing with the rest of the world. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record **these warnings**³ I will primarily focus on the thirteenth chapter of Mark.

Before examining the Mark passage, let me remind you that to accurately interpret Scripture, you MUST consider the context of whatever passage you study. The immediate context of Jesus' command to watch and pray is His entire discourse. His command to watch and pray is tied directly to the things He was warning His disciples about in this discourse (known as the "Olivet Discourse.") But in this analysis, it is helpful also to consider the wider context which happens to be the entire New Testament. Extremely relevant to the things Jesus said in this Olivet discourse is His abundant teaching about what it means to be one of His disciples.

Jesus said, *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-27).* In other words, unless a person is willing to die for Jesus, he cannot be His disciple. This is important to consider when analyzing Jesus' warnings in the Olivet discourse because there, He warns about the coming persecution of Christians. Many will be killed on account of their allegiance to Jesus. He warns us to watch and pray so that in that day, we hold fast to our confession lest we perish with the rest of the world (end up in hell).

In Mark 13:4, Jesus' disciples ask Him when these last things will take place. Beginning in Mark 13:7, Jesus begins to warn them that many false prophets will arise and deceive many people near the end. He also alerts them about how Christians will be severely persecuted. *"They will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them" (Mark 13:9).* He also warns them that loved ones will participate in the persecution of Christians. *"Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Mark 13:12-13).*

In verse 13, Jesus specifies that only those who endure to the end will be saved. The true disciples will be willing to die for Jesus. Their faith will be proved real under such tribulation. Those with superficial faith will perish along with the rest of the world.

¹ One of them added, "If I were to pray that way, wouldn't that be the same as doubting God's promise that all the elect will be glorified in accordance to Romans 8:30?"

² Some of these have quoted John 6:37-40 to explain why they believe this. (Most Christians are unaware that Jesus' promise in that passage is to those who come and keep on coming to Him because the verb/participle (τὸν ἐρχόμενον) is in the Greek present tense. Only these will be raised on the last day.) **For more details on this, click this.**

³ It appears that many of my Christian friends are not taking His warnings seriously.

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Later in the chapter, Jesus provides information about things that will happen near the end. In light of all these things and because their eternal safety is at stake, Jesus tells them they will not know for sure when the end takes place so they need to stay on high alert at all times. In order that they are not caught off guard and perish with **the rest of the world**,⁴ Jesus commands them to watch and pray. (See Mark 13:33.) Apparently, it is going to get so bad that God will intercede and bring about the end abruptly for the sake of the elect so that they too do not end up perishing. (See Mark 13:22.)

You might be reading this and wondering how this (falling away) could happen to "followers of Jesus." Luke adds information that helps us understand how this can happen. In this same discourse, Jesus said, *"Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly"* (Luke 21:34). To help them avoid this, Jesus again warns and commands, *"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."* By "these things," Jesus is referring to their hearts becoming weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and cares of this life. If you are thinking to yourself, "This would never happen to me," watch out! Anyone who thinks such a thing could never happen to them is proud and especially vulnerable to such a fall! This is what Peter thought when he said, *"Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death"* (Luke 22:33). (Shortly after saying this, Peter denied Jesus on multiple occasions.)

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul warned them about the seriousness of the spiritual war which features Satan as our adversary. Like Jesus, Paul did not want them to become casualties of that war. He wanted them to stand and keep standing. He did not want them to fall. At the end of that passage, he tells them to **pray always with all prayer and supplication, being watchful with all perseverance.** (See Ephesians 6:10-18.⁵)

There are other examples of admonitions and commands to watch and pray that we do not end up falling away. If you have not done so yet, I encourage you to [review some of these by clicking this link.](#)

Lastly, let me paste below just a few examples of people that seem to pray in harmony with the warnings of Jesus and Paul.

Proverbs 30:7-9 *Two things I request of You (Deprive me not before I die): ⁸ Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches -- Feed me with the food allotted to me; ⁹ Lest I be full and deny You, And say, "Who is the LORD?" Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God.*

Psalms 16:1-11 *Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust. ² O my soul, you have said to the LORD, "You are my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You." ³ As for the saints who are on the earth, "They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight." ⁴ Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god; Their drink offerings of blood I will not offer, Nor take up their names on my lips. ⁵ O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot. ⁶ The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance. ⁷ I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons. ⁸ I have set the LORD always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. ¹⁰ For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You*

⁴ This is obvious from the context of the entire passage which includes Jesus' warning that only those who endure to the end will be saved.

⁵ **Ephesians 6:10-18** *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance*

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allow Your Holy One to see corruption. ¹¹ You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 119:10 With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!

Psalm 119:33-38 ³ Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, And I shall keep it to the end. ³⁴ Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. ³⁵ Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it. ³⁶ Incline my heart to Your testimonies, And not to covetousness. ³⁷ Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, And revive me in Your way. ³⁸ Establish Your word to Your servant, Who is devoted to fearing You.

Psalm 28:1-3 To You I will cry, O LORD my Rock: Do not be silent to me, Lest, if You are silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. ² Hear the voice of my supplications When I cry to You, When I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary. ³ Do not take me away with the wicked And with the workers of iniquity,

Closing remarks and applications

Obedying Jesus' command to watch and pray begins with a watchful attitude and heartfelt concern for your soul. Your actual prayers should be in response to the burden that God places upon your heart from day to day. Notice in the Proverbs passage above, the believer asked God to provide basic sustenance rather than abundance SO THAT he does not have so much that he ends up denying the Lord later in life. Notice that the Psalmist prayed that God would keep him from wandering away from His commandments.

Have you ever wondered how Peter prayed subsequent to his denial of Jesus? On the night of Jesus betrayal, Peter was too sleepy to watch and pray even though Jesus warned him on more than one occasion that night to pray lest he enter into temptation. Consider a conversation that took place earlier that night:

Simon Peter says to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going, you are not able to follow Me now. But later, you will follow Me." Peter says to Him, "Lord, why am I not able to follow You now? I will lay my life down for You." Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly I say to you that no rooster can crow until you have denied Me three times" (John 13:36-38).

Jesus told Peter that at that point in time, he was "not able" to follow Him. But according to Jesus, Peter would be able to follow Him later. (From the context, it is clear Peter understood that Jesus was talking about following Him to the cross.) In spite of Jesus' words, Peter insisted that he would lay down his life for Jesus. Then Jesus told Peter that he would deny Him that night.

After Jesus rose from the dead, how do you think Peter prayed moving forward? Due to his traumatic fall, Peter undoubtedly was more watchful from that point on. He now knew that Jesus' assessment of him earlier was correct. (He was not able.) He probably took encouragement from Jesus' words that later, he would be able to die for Him. But surely, he knew that within himself, he had no ability to lay down his life for Jesus. Having no confidence in his own ability to do this, he surely began praying daily that God would prepare him so that he would some day be able (by God's grace) to lay down his life for Jesus. Eventually, God did make Peter able to lay down his life for Jesus.

Should we not have the same watchfulness and concern that Peter had following his great fall? In light of our shallow depth of spirituality, should we not be even more concerned? I have absolutely no confidence that I am able to lay down my life for Jesus. As a result, I pray daily that God will **prepare me for that day.**⁶ I am glad I have the opportunity to pray ahead of time that God will give me grace in that hour. I am also praying that in the meantime, God will enable me to persevere so that I do not end up falling away. I know from His Word and from personal

⁶ Since I began to more seriously ask God to prepare me, I believe that God has been gently answering my prayers. Chiefly, during the past two years, my heart stopped beating (on five occasions) for several seconds. Doctors subsequently installed a pacemaker to keep that from happening. But the experience has reminded me that my life on earth is very temporary. This and other trials have been causing me to increasingly look forward to my heavenly home and desire it more than this early home. I believe God is answering my prayers.

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experience that I am fully capable of drifting and becoming loaded down with the cares of this world. So, I pray that God would do whatever is necessary to keep that from happening. I also pray for my friends and loved ones that He would do all this for them. And I pray every day for the Christians who are currently being persecuted and killed. I pray that God sustains them in their faith so that they are able to endure their sufferings and they hold fast their confession even unto death should God so order.

Hopefully, you too are praying that God will keep you near Him and give you grace to endure so that you do not end up falling away. But please know that if you are still not taking Jesus' warnings seriously enough, you are disobeying Him. Jesus' warnings come in the form of a **command**.⁷ If your theological deductions are blinding you so that you do not see the urgency of the matter, I advise you to bring them to God with a willingness to jettison them. What is more important, obedience to Jesus or holding fast to theological positions that seem to make the commandment of Jesus **of no effect**?⁸ Jesus commanded these things because He does not want you to perish.

-End of article

Supplemental notes:

1) A related article: [It is not within us to persevere, but persevere we must!](#) (with several quotes from Jonathan Edwards)

2) The primary objection (about my article) that I hear from Christians is this tightly held idea that a Christian can have "100% assurance of salvation." Therefore, let me bluntly respond to anyone who thinks this way.

Can you be 100% certain that if asked to renounce Jesus or die that you would hold fast your confession and die for Him? NO! You cannot be 100% certain. But Jesus warned that if we deny Him before men, He will deny us before the Father. If you claim that you can be 100% certain of this, I advise you to take heed lest you find yourself denying Jesus just as Peter denied him. Until you are right about to die for Jesus, you cannot be absolutely certain that you are indeed, one of the elect. (That is why we are instructed to "make our call and election sure." - II Peter 1:10)

I would go so far as to say that we Christians living in the United States have very limited evidence to show by our life that our faith is genuine. Until our faith is fully put to the test, how can we be 100% sure that it is real? I am suggesting that for most of us, because of our cushy lives, there is limited evidence that our faith is real, thus making "100% assurance of salvation" impossible. **Note: There are many things that Christians CAN be 100% certain about.** [Click this to see some.](#)

-End of blunt response

3) One Christian brother asked me, *"Do you think it's not important to be clear in our own minds and in our teaching whether we can be fully assured of our final salvation or not? I happen to think that it is vital to know; and that Scripture directly states it in places too numerous to cite."* (I am pretty sure he only mentioned one of these places to me during our exchange.) My response: I am aware of the few scriptures that people quote to support this friend's view. I maintain that my articles do not disagree at all with those scriptures! I also have observed a tendency in those who claim there are scriptures "too numerous to cite." Many of them seem to turn a blind eye to the plethora of New Testament verses that support what I am teaching. So, instead of accusing me of ignoring certain scriptures, they should take the time to consider the abundance of verses that support what I have been saying. [They can view some of them by clicking this link.](#)

⁷ The verbs are in the imperative mood.

⁸ How is this different from the error of the Pharisees? *"Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."* He answered and said to them, *"Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? 'For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' 'But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God' -- 'then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition."* *"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "* (Matthew 15:2-9).